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SMOKE



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S M O K E

Sea Gulls in Kansas

What are you doing here so far inland?

Have you grown weary of your native seas
That now you circle over loam and sand

Where ships give place to windmills and lone trees?

Or is it that within your fragile skulls

Is lodged a secret known to but a few
Of your wild clan of ocean-wandering gulls,
That once this sky's inverted shell of blue

Enclosed an inland sea's cool slide and surge

Where now our heavy wheat fields ripely burn?
Is it because of this ancestral urge
Your scanty pilgrim bands at times return?

Perhaps you still fare forth with stubborn hope

That some strange day, ages and aeons hence,
The ghastly cuttle-fish again will grope
Where now I lean against a barbed-wire fence.

And who shall say that in ten million years

Earth may not shift once more to scratch her skin
And oust us all, our cornfields and fat steers,
In favor of the flashing tail and fin?

It well may be your mad unconscious trust

Is justified, that one of your far heirs
Will dip his wing in waves above this dust
In which I stand, while in cold mountain lairs

My race's wretched remnant shrinks and dies

You fear to light? Is it because beneath
Immobile waves you think may lurk to rise
Some shape with savage rows of clashing teeth?

KENNETH W. PORTER

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S M O K E

Antarctic from New England

(For John Dyer)

While here light stretches wide upon
The softened sky and flowering air,
Its last pale glowing withers there,
Flashes along the ice, and gone

Under the dark wind, perished, shall
Grow no longer there till here
Light thins withdrawing; save its sere
Gigantic ghosts that loom and wall

That farthest sky, and rise and shrink
And rise in nameless stars that blow
Above the enormous canyoned snow,
Round the black waters at its brink.

And there at man's remotest place
The voyagers beyond sun and time
Enact a brief prophetic mime,
The ultimate hour of the race

When man at his extremest south
Shall lift his freezing eyes to see
The planets fading down while he
Feels darkness slowly choke his mouth,

And listens vainly for the sea.
And then as now the man shall know
It matters nothing how he go;
Though he shall wear the light in glee

Or weep to put the cold night on,
He turns unfriended and alone
Less sure than wind, less loved than stone
In revolutions of the sun.

WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT

This Room of Masks

Only in that still room where common daylight falters
Through the blinds or if it exists at all
Lives like remembrance in his mind, he moves
Without encumbrance; for on the wall

Set on a grooved shelf (like so many stone plates) stand
His clay faces, dimly—always one gone—and he alters
The scheme when he comes and goes, with a deft hand
Practised, assured, following the behooves

Of the illuminate brain. With what he fronts
The world is here in the secret, musty dusk—
Like a room, in the stage-wings, of a curious quiet
Awaiting sense of things where a head may try its

Various semblances—husk after husk.
A clown-face and a face for death, and one once
Relevant to dead love—all eyeless here
But aware and in place and ready.

He grows old and comes less often; the drear
Shadows of light content him, and sometimes indeed
His only purpose is a need, apparently, of steady
Long staring at the row of them in the dark;

And the face for death least dusty; but certain others
Neither less nor more worthy than their brothers
Are fungused with grain of earth and dirt's seed,
Accumulate with years and no more mark.

And as for what wore them—what under them all
Was?—Does the heart assume its strike
Or be other than pulse I wonder, and doubt. The fall
Of dry thunder threatens all clay alike.

S M O K E

Night Pieces for Dollarica

8:00 P. M. Within this loneliest of all lonesome hours
A man must always walk alone
As though pursued of in pursuit
Among this pride of stone enough
To make the earth lopsided

walk

While at his feet the darkness licks
The almost liquid light from yellow bricks

Always a man must walk when night
Comes nosing down the streets and alleys
Nervous with noises, lame
Laughter and violent voices
Vibrating to such god-gut chords
As, should he put his doubts
In words, would pitch his shouts
Falsetto

9:00 P. M. For there are
There are doubts if this So-Much
That he may never know nor love nor touch
May never know if he possess
Or be possessed by it

So-Much

Can fill the loneliness his steps confess
Or yield companion in such solitude
As he walks through as though pursued
Or in pursuit of something, somewhy
Alien to flesh and blood

S M O K E

10:00 P. M. Follow the sadness of these sidewalks on
To quieter places

Sunday-shaven lawns

Follow the rows of model bungalows
Until the heel's ventriloquies disturb
The pious-puckered quiet of
Some new suburb

until, until

You can not stop, by merely standing still
The shove of that intolerable thought
Of all these people laid, in beds
Forever being bought, so snugly
Two-by-two, so far apart together
—to that thought's sure conclusion that
It's mostly hearts in feathers

Then turn, return
With a sense of satisfaction
As though a last installment had been paid
Following back the lane of green and red
Back to where we need not think
And there's no use to speak of such
Wisdom as a traffic light
Finds worth winking at
All night

S M O K E

11:00 P. M. So let the casual clocks that cross
Their fingers casually
Before their faces, hocus
Pocus that relentless rattle
Our here-to-thereness out of ways and places

And let those whiskers of thin light
With which air-beacons
Hermit out the night, wheel
Wheel and hypnotize
And heal the fever of insomnious eyes

Now sleep, the city sleepy
With the purr that pulls our culture
Out of pipes and wires

until the bald

Blue rising of the sun
And the relentless rattle rebegun
And poets cancel with quotation marks
Their nebular indexes of desire

12:00 M. So habit drags around the rimless
Spokes of days
And death comes on in ignominious ways

S M O K E

1:00 A. M. For the waiter waits
Waiting, fingering a cord
That dangles from the light
Not to be cozened or caressed with words
The curt finality of his good-night

Somewhere an old man clears his sticky throat

The gaiety of desperation coughs
Three last queer piccolo notes
And they too wander off
To alienate themselves among
The bricks and ventpipes of the commonplace

The moon has no expression of its face

2:00 A. M. And the last owl-car, for a curious
Rat, creeps
Hesitant along the avenue
Where ornamental street lights droop
With incandescent dew

Say, in this grotesque pastoral there wake
One man of country blood
Who stares with blurred
Uncertain eyes, a moment to distinguish
And detect, the moment that it takes
To recognize the false-teeth of buildings
Chewing the fog's soft cud

S M O K E

3:00 A. M. They soothe their pennymania with sleep
Sleep soothing this democracy of
Kings, snug in their poverty
Of needless and accumulated things

They sleep

Pilloved upon this drumhead
Of the night, ghosted by
Ticker taps
Awhile betrayed into eternity
The Now-ist naps

4:00 A. M. Day breaks on Dollarica with a long
Slow slanting heat, the spoked light climbing
Gearwise street by numbered
Street; the cogs of light fitting
The cogs of windows, crushing
The sleeper
Deeper, or turning back the sheets
Of those who slumbered
But now must wait on green or rush
The red

S M O K E

5:00 A. M. At last, a stranger on a stranger's bed
Under a stranger's roof, I lay me down
I lay me down and hold my eyes
Button-bald for traffic lights to
Mesmerize

What have they seen

Red green

Hocus

Pocus

Kosmocus

Sleep . . . sleep

It's polus for the solus

Red . . . green . . . green . . . red

Or lift a head sleepheavy head, asking

"Are the five o'clock people

— ready?" "The five o'clock people are

— ready." Body be deep

Sleep

HOWARD NUTT

Day Among Many

The dawn, enchanted and unchallenged,
Had glory in it. The air of morning stirred
So fresh across my face that I was well,
And glad to be outdoors awake. I heard

Till noon the bells that quartered every hour.
Working, I wasted hope and words and hate.
Although my window faced the timeless sky,
A calendar insisted on the date.

All day a brave new world seemed possible:
Over enormous loneliness and space
A voice might call, the sudden light stream out,
The love of man for man transform one face.

I crossed the country of the afternoon.
My mind was tired with self, my eyes with sun.
The middle road I took through mortal fact
Was crowded, noisy, but the widest one.

In the liberal evening it was good
To shrug the daytime off, give up the blurred
White faces, and the anxious energy,
The nameless fragmentary voices heard.

It was good to wring the memory clean,
In evening light, of all the hours of day,
And turn to love again, and living words,
And the heart's fire nothing could take away.

JOHN A. HOLMES

S M O K E

John Obolon

John Obolon when dawn was gone
Crept through the pastures, going eastward,
Crept through the warm air of the wet spring,
Crept through the long grass grown of dark loam.
So did the east wind rough his hair up,
So did the drab sky drip the rain down,
So did the lone bird fly on brown wing,
So did the rook scream from the pine grove:
That he, John Obolon, moved slowly
Through the long pasture lands to homeward:
Thinking of eight cows lazy browsing,
Thinking of fees that came at month ends.

John Obolon awoke at dawn
Sometimes in sorrow, sometimes wonder,
Leaving his bed in any weather,
Driving the eight cows to the pasture;
And always homeward crept thereafter
Feeling the earth sink underneath him.
John Obolon was free of hurry,
John Obolon was slow to movement,
John Obolon was without speech,
John Obolon shrugged only—
Being since childhood stricken dumb.
Is this America, he asks us?
John Obolon asks with his eyes.
Is this America the homeland?
John Obolon creeps through the fence bars
And makes with heavy feet in brogans
To earn his fees, his month end wages.

Gone suddenly the east wind, turning
Face about and blowing westward,
Sending the clouds back, breaking rain sheets,
Clearing the sky, uncovering sun shafts.

S M O K E

Now do the grasses gleam and shimmer,
Now do the trees hang thick with water,
Now is the morning cleansed and freshened,
Now is John Obolon made wakeful.
Beautiful sun—so dull a dawning
To wakening find outside the window
Hid in the eves of the farmhouse yonder;
So drab a dawn that steals uncovered
Like to the night save paler, paler;
So drab a dawn at once grown glorious
Because a wind blown forward faces
The other sky and kicks its heels up,
Peeling the clouds off like a fruit skin,
Charging the sun to pour the warmth down,
Staining the sky with a satiny finish.

And now John Obolon gone forward
Out of the pasture to the roadway,
On to where the brook stream tinkles music,
Hears as he nears the brook young treble voices
Risen in merriment, risen in discontent,
Sees as he clears a patch thick with barbed berry vines
Children with fish lines caught knotted together.

John Obolon feels the emotion within him stir,
Looks to the children with dimly compassionate eyes,
Sees there before him yellow heads, not black,
Straight hair and thin hair, not enmassed and frizzled hair.
John Obolon sees children born of him,
Feels their damp hands clutch at his shirt front, opened,
Sees pale eyes shine, wide mouths go back in laughter,
Hears quick bright voices . . .

John Obolon stoops down
And works with patient hands untying knots.

See, he says inwardly, having no speech,
See, he says, taking the lines now untangled,
Draw yourselves farther apart on the banking—

S M O K E

"Tis your too closeness that causes the lines to catch.
Sit with your knees spread, your feet planted on the rocks,
Swing your lines backward and wave them above your heads,
Whip them as if they were lashing the devil's back,
Sink the bait in the stream, watch for a twitch of string.
Now do the children sit speechless in wonderment,
Gathered together like disciples carved out of stone,
Watching the line that shall entice a string of fish,
Watching John Obolon, sensing his listening. . . .
Now do his steady hands bring up the master catch:
One trout of goodly length wriggles and slowly dies.

John Obolon, John Obolon,
Come homeward at the end of dawn,
Were you too quickly lead astray
By memories, by memories?
The little black haired children play
At catching fish, John Obolon,
And you who have your own away
Stoop down to teach them patiently
What others have no need to see.
Yet there upon the road he walks,
A man with city ways, attired
In clean clothes welded to his body,
Neither in disarray nor shoddy,
Staring down contemptuous
On you whose hair the west winds toss,
Whose shirt unbuttoned shows browned skin,
Whose throat is stout, whose stockings thin.
Contemptuous eyes eyes unfeeling stare
And words pass out the frugal mouth:
"No license? then ten dollars fine!"
"No money? then a month in jail!"

S M O K E

John Obolon goes down the road
Immediately after dawn,
His master's eyes full shrewd and wise
Imprinted on his silenced thoughts . .
You leave me at the sowing time,
You leave me at the sowing time,
How can I pay you what I owe?
John Obolon goes down the road
Immediately after dawn.

ELIZABETH JANE ASTLEY

ELIZABETH JANE ASTLEY

John Obolon

obviously makes new use of a hitherto unpromising meter, in her first contribution to this magazine. She lives in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

JOHN ALBERT HOLMES, JR.

Day Among Many

has published poems in the *Atlantic*, *Harpers*, *Poetry*, in the American and English *Saturday Reviews*, and numerous other magazines. He is a contributing editor of the *American Poetry Journal*. He lives in Somerville, Massachusetts.

HOWARD NUTT

Night Pieces for Dollarica

by residence a member of the "Peoria Group" (in Illinois), has published in many of the experimentalist magazines. Much of his previous work has dealt with the relation between man and the soil; in this poem, but one of a series on "Dollarica", he attacks the problem of the contemporary American debacle.

(Nota Bene: the "Peoria Group" is not so self-titled, and is NOT a Poetry Society).

KENNETH PORTER

Sea Gulls in Kansas

has attended Harvard Graduate School. He gives us his address as Sterling, Kansas. This is by no means his first publication.

WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT

Antarctic from New England

This Room of Masks

assistant Literary Editor of the *Providence Sunday Journal*, has had work in *Poetry*, *Hound & Horn*, and several other anthologies and magazines, including *Thomas Moult's Best Poems of—*.

